KRISTIAN KROKFORS
Paintings and Works on Paper
Acknowledgements

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Foreword

In conjuring, the quickness of the hand deceives the eye. In art it takes rather more. Kristian Krookfors is sometimes a painter, and sometimes a sculptor, and quite often leaves us in genuine doubt about which he is being at any given time. Not for nothing is the particular technique he has mastered called trompe l’œil, since deceiving the spectator’s eye, making him believe he is seeing one thing when actually he is looking at another, is not the raison d’être, at least a vital part of the effect.

In the history of art, trompe l’œil has always seemed faintly disreputable, tarred with frivolity. Of course, it may be fun for the spectator to be taken in, as well as for the entertainer who does the taking. But surely art must have a higher mission than just providing fun, and the artist should be something much loftier than a mere entertainer? If so, no one seems to have told Krookfors. But then, while fun may dispel solemnity, there is no reason to suppose that it is incompatible with seriousness – artistic seriousness especially.

Kristian Krookfors is an eminently serious artist. His works are in no sense didactic, but if you were to ask what they are “about”, the answer would spring unbidden, without any verbal prompting from him. Yes, they are, they must be, about the environment. They take as their evident, immediate subject the splendours and miseries of town planning and urbanism’s shaky relations with whatever belt of green it chooses to girdle itself with. They look at the dryness of the desert, the acrid smoke that belches from factories, the wind that shakes the barley – or would, if there were any barley left to shake.

This probably sounds grim, and indeed one may guess that Krookfors is not too cheery about ecological futures – but then, who is? On the other hand, this is merely something one can guess from a bald summary of his subject matter. It leaves totally out of account the way the basic material is treated. That is where the playful side of Krookfors’ nature comes into play, not to mention his delight in colour.

Sometimes in previous shows, as mentioned, he has ventured into sculpture, carving wood into miniature landscapes, a grassy knoll dotted with trees and buildings, or a neatly laid road lined with what look like prime examples of the topiarist’s art. These are without a doubt three-dimensional. But the same show contains other variations of the same subjects where it is impossible to be so sure, at least without going up really close and committing the ultimate gallery crime of trying to touch.

Then there are the excursions into imaginary architecture. Starting with fairly straightforward homages to the architect’s outline plans, the architectural works develop into whole towns laid out on grid patterns. And though these are imaged on perfectly flat canvases or pieces of paper, it is virtually impossible to believe that this is so, at least without the testimony of a taboo finger. For Krookfors’ skill at creating an illusion of depth and protuberance is fantastic. The arrangement of light within the picture, the way it falls so evenly and precisely from its imaginary source, the way that the same colour is modified by being in the light or in the shade, shows a skill in the esoteric art of trompe l’œil untouched since the eighteenth century. The colour is indeed often the key, both to the illusion and to the putting forward of some inner significance. Krookfors’ dome-like hills (hill-like domes?) evenly planted with trees, like so many other-worldly olive groves, swelter in the angry late-afternoon sunlight or assume at will all the colours of the rainbow. Is this our own world, or some parallel world conjured out of Philip Pullman’s imagination? Is this the dust that gives life to the universe, or merely the dust that has closed Helen’s eye? And does it matter? As the eye travels over Krookfors’ delicious, ambiguous surface, the temptation to abandon oneself to its sybaritic delights is irresistible.

John Russell Taylor
Today, the debate on mankind and the condition of Western/Nordic culture continues. Many artists wonder what constitutes an “enigma” in the visual arts. Despite the restless machinations of history, the Neo-Surrealist experiment continues to intrigue us in the twenty-first century.

The most striking feature of Neo-Surrealist art is its disturbing power, which engages us with a peculiar aesthetic effect, strange and frightening yet mysteriously compelling and vital. As demonstrated in the works of Kristian Krokfors, the Neo-Surrealist image arrests the viewer with a pervasive sense of the uncanny that eludes our political, aesthetic and historical descriptions.

The Neo-Surrealist vision emerges from this peculiar sense of premonition infused with a sense of longing and desire. The unusual state of mind expressed in Neo-Surrealist art recalls types of archaic or ecstatic religious experience. Fear and awe, attraction and repulsion are, in the artist’s opinion, the essence of an unmediated experience and the holy. The web that connects the weird, the uncanny and the extraordinary to the sacred provides the pivotal clue to our experience of Neo-Surrealist art.

Neo-Surrealist art elicits emotions and suggestions that belong to the phenomenology of human experience that combines religion, aesthetics, psychology and art, rather than to conventional art history. It is precisely this heightened emotional effect, which cannot be defined, that is most vividly apparent and avidly desired by the Post-Modern appetite for extraordinary or intense experience. The pursuit of the numinous experience that combines religion, aesthetics, psychology and art, rather than to conventional art history. It is precisely this heightened emotional effect, which cannot be defined, that is most vividly apparent and avidly desired by the Post-Modern conscience as well as our personal, aesthetic and historical descriptions.

The word refers to chance, destiny fate and ultimately death itself. For many contemporary artists, the use of weird in their work conveys the sense of a powerful force that stands out of the spectrum of everyday life. As in the ambivalent force of the sacred, the weird provokes a sense of awe connected to the force of destiny. For Krokfors, the term weird is conceptually linked on the one hand to wonder and to miracle. On the other hand the power of the weird determines the types of events that occur in the unexpected course of time. The ambivalence of the weird is manifest when it suggests life as ordained by providence or the destiny of human life, death itself.

The weird suggests a power within certain individuals or recurring events, neither good nor evil, but always striking or disturbing. The ambivalent potency of the archaic “wyrd” power that encompasses wonder, awe, miracle, predestination, or death re-emerges again in the popular use of the adjective “weird” to suggest any moment or occurrence that is extraordinary, strange, coincidental, or faithful. As we experience in Krokfors’ work, tension that surrounds the weird is revealed through a specific moment of time or through the compelling image on which one’s destiny turns.

For Krokfors the uncanny reveals aspects of the web of meaning between the weird, chance or coincidence, the epiphany and fate. Elements of this web point to the ambivalence that provokes the unusual emotion state of the Neo-Surreal. The sense of the uncanny oscillates between the familiar and the unfamiliar between appearance and actuality. Like the weird, the uncanny exists at the threshold of religion, imbuing ordinary phenomena with fearsome energy.

As a category of religio-aesthetic emotion, the uncanny illuminates the Neo-Surreal state of mind against the background of the gothic fairy tale, the belief in predestination, and the nineteenth-century novel. The uncanny is an unsettling awareness associated with a peculiar emotion of creeping dread and foreboding. It derives from a remarkable coincidence or recurrence of events, or from whatever is gloomy, ghastly, haunted, secret or concealed. The element of the uncanny provokes uneasy tension; it derives from “Central European and Nordic literature”, Romantic art and the ghost story and later becomes a distinct characteristic of Neo-Surrealist art.

In reverse, the uncanny element in Neo-Surrealist art points up “the life in lifelessness”. The strangely menacing object - the secretive suitcase, the peculiar industrial object, forested mountain ranges, removed from similar context and more poignantly human thereby – attempts to change our experience of the ordinary world. Even Marcel Duchamp’s anthropomorphic machine art and readymades contradict an inert mechanistic view of the world. These psychological reversals occur in the readymades where the bottle rack or shovel becomes animistically charged, or in The Large Glass where sexuality is teasingly mechanised, just animating the machine and making intimacy public – hence defused of romantic meaning between The Bride and her Bachelors. In the Neo-Surreal domain, fundamental distinctions no longer apply. Boundaries between the secret and the familiar are erased; the distinction between biology and metaphysics is confounded. In this respect, Krokfors has concluded that “It is living and ceasing to live that are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere.”

Krokfors’ work describes a unique range of spiritual experiences in the epiphany, the moment of illumination or revelation that punctuates ordinary experience with unusually heightened meaning. Like magic, Krokfors’ approach emanates from a separate order of existence with its own rules, time and space. The artist’s key attributes are spontaneity and risk, in which uncertainty predominates. To play requires an active imagination, serendipity of circumstance and knowledge, and the ability to find connections where none existed previously. Games based on the laws of chance demand extreme concentration and psychological flexibility. In Krokfors’ “game theory”, the protagonists or players define new rules to play the game, or to play a new game.

The Neo-Surrealists, like the early Surrealists of the 1920’s, have invoked the powers of imagination to respond to chance, creating art that reveals the concealed order lying within supposed disorder. They have created art with unpredictable processes such as collage and the fractured object. Such random encounters reinforce a magical conception of the world, where play is a magical impulse that has far-reaching consequences. The high purpose of Krokfors’ Neo-Surrealist art – drawings, paintings and prints - is to transform modern consciousness – that is, of Nietzsche, Freud and Mauss, etc.

Unlike reason, the imagination does not rely on sequential thinking but rather works by analogy and association. The imagination’s subliminal processes lead to a sense of recognition that may include the word of sequential reasoning, but it is a reasoning subsumed and transformed into the logic of symbols. By using chance, Krokfors has discarded centuries of artistic facility and aesthetic conventions. Chance for the artist is a material force that unfolds in unexpected but portentous ways. By using automatic approaches, riskily derived from free association, he creates works of imposing material beauty and freshness.

The weird, the uncanny and the epiphany are connected to the state of mind of the Nordic Neo-Surreal, with its awareness of power, magic and the marvellous. This web of perceptions extends from the central experience of numinous power characterized by the ambivalence of awe and attraction. In short, Krokfors’ playful endeavour intentionally turns the notion of high art upside-down.

Dr. Michael Casey

Kristian Krokfors: Capturing the Nordic Neo-Surreal - The Weird, The Uncanny, The Epiphany
Faraway 2
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
40 x 40cm

Faraway 1
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
160 x 260cm

Faraway 3
Acrylic on canvas, 2008
148 x 112cm
Faraway 4
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
50 x 50cm

Faraway 5
Acrylic on canvas, 2005
60 x 60cm
Faraway 6
Acrylic on canvas mounted on curved support, 2008
60 x 160 x 18cm deep

Faraway 7
Acrylic on canvas mounted on curved support, 2006
60 x 157 x 18cm deep

Abstract Landscape
Acrylic on canvas mounted on curved support, 2007
40 x 120 x 12cm deep
Townscape 2
Acrylic on paper in nine parts mounted on aluminum, 2007
Each panel 50 x 50cm

Habitation
Acrylic on paper, 2007
57.5 x 38cm
Lights and Shadows
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
30 x 80cm

Townscape 3
Acrylic on paper in eight parts mounted on aluminum, 2007
Each panel 50 x 60cm
Untitled I - 4
Acrylic on paper, 2007
each 24 x 24cm

Suburb
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
180 x 180cm
City Lights
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
50 x 50cm

Untitled 5 - 8
Acrylic on paper, 2007
each 24 x 24cm
Habitation 2
Acrylic on canvas mounted on curved support, 2007
40 x 120 x 12cm deep
Lights and Shadows 2
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
50 x 70cm

Untitled 9 - 12
Acrylic on paper, 2007
each 24 x 24cm
Brief Biography

1952 Born Ylistaro, Finland.
1973-74 Studied Art at The University of Industrial Arts, Helsinki, Finland.
1974-77 Studied at Leicester Polytechnic, England, where he received his BA.

Recent one man shows include

2001 Galleria Harmaja, Oulu, Finland.
   Första Galleriet, Helsingborg, Sweden.
   Auran Galleria, Turku, Finland.
2002 Galleria Uusitalo, Helsinki, Finland.
   Galleria Nuovo, Lahti, Finland.
2003 Auran Galleria, Turku, Finland.
2004 Galleria Harmaja, Oulu, Finland.
   Galleri Norske Grafikere, Oslo, Norway.
   Alex Gallery, Washington DC, USA.
2005 Galleria Uusitalo, Helsinki, Finland.
   Art Centre, Salmela, Finland.
2007 Instituto Iberoamericano de Finlandia, Madrid, Spain.
   Galleria Harmaja, Oulu, Finland.
   Willa Mac, Tampere, Finland.
   Lemonstreet Gallery, Dublin, Ireland.

Recent group shows include

2000 Lemonstreet Gallery, Dublin, Ireland (inaugural exhibition).
   Susipinx, Sysmä, Finland.
   Galleria G, Helsinki, Finland.
   Association of Finnish Printmakers 70th Anniversary Show, Helsinki Art Hall, Finland.
   International Miniprint Triennial, Lahti Art Museum, Finland.
   Susipinx, Sysmä, Finland.
2005 Taidekeskus Salmela, Mäntyharju, Finland.
2006 Susipinx, Sysmä, Finland.
2007 Idän Taju, Hyvinkää Art Museum, Finland.
   International Miniprint Triennial, Lahti Art Museum, Finland.
   London Original Print Fair at the Royal Academy of Arts, England.
   IFPOA Print Fair, New York City, USA.

Abstract Landscape 2
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
110 x 160cm
Collections include

Finland

Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; The Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki; The Helsinki City Art Museum; Tampere Art Museum; Tampere Museum of Modern Art; Wäinö Aaltonen Museum, Turku; Lahti Art Museum; Mikkeli Art Museum; Hämeenlinna Art Museum; Kouvola Art Museum; Oulu Art Museum; Kemi Art Museum; Aine Museum of Art, Tornio; The State Collection; Parliament of Finland Collection; The City of Kouvola; The City of Espoo; The City of Porvoo; The City of Vantaa; The City of Vaasa; Wihuri Foundation; Paulo Foundation; The City of Lappeenranta; ALTIA; Fortum; Nordea; Telia Sonera; Nokia; Stora Enso.

Outside Finland

Chicago Art Institute, USA; Albertina Collection, Vienna, Austria; University College Dublin, Ireland; Art Museum of Lodz, Poland; The Art Museum of Cracow, Poland; The National Museum of Szczecin, Poland; The State Collection, Sweden; The City of Nürnberg, Germany; World Bank, Washington DC, USA; Banque Société Générale de France, Sweden; Svenska Handelsbanken, Sweden; Citibank, England; Morgan Bank, South Korea; Office of Public Works, Dublin, Ireland; Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, Ireland; Baxter Finance, Dublin, Ireland; Coleman Lavelle Solicitors, Dublin, Ireland; Pharmacia, Cork, Ireland; PFPC, Ireland; Tipperary Crystal, Ireland.

Awards

1979  First Prize, Drawing Competition of the State Art Work Committee, Finland.
1982  Scholarship Prize, Biennial Exhibition of Prints for Young Artists, Vaasa, Finland.
1985  Young Artist of the Year 1985, Tampere, Finland.

Faraway 8
Acrylic on canvas, 2007
20 x 50.7cm